

The Funky Mamas: Learning to create and perform music for young children within a community of practice

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Abstract

This article reports a case study examining the music learning and making of the Funky Mamas – five professional mother-musicians who create and perform music for young children at festivals, fairs, theatres and community events across Canada. Data were collected through interviews with the band members and field observations of rehearsals and live performances. Analysis involved the coding and sorting of data for correspondence to emergent themes and for themes suggested and informed by the theoretical framework of Etienne Wenger's *Communities of Practice* (1998). The author draws from the Funky Mamas' relating of experiences and perceptions to illustrate their processes of learning through practice, including: evolving forms of mutual engagement; understanding and tuning their enterprise; and developing repertoire, styles and discourses. Findings from this study inform implications for teaching and learning; the author suggests how music educators might support and enrich learning-through-practice processes amongst their own students.

Keywords

music education; communities of practice; community music; informal music learning; music for young children; teaching and learning

Introduction

We moved here and we didn't really have any friends, or community or anything. I was looking for something to do with [my daughter] and with me. I met Kate and our babies were exactly the same age. She said, 'I've got this thing we're going to, you should come – we play music!' I was so excited and so nervous. I can remember the first time I came I went to the door and I had to turn around and go back, because... you know those life moments that you know are so important and you're so excited that you don't think it's actually going to happen, you're so worried that it's not going to happen that you can barely stand it? (Chantal)

A little over a decade ago a group of young new mothers began making music together. They gathered at church basement playgroups and potluck play dates with instruments and diaper bags in tow. Playing and singing together with and for their children they connected and became entwined by the bonds of motherhood and music. What began as an intimate venture soon seeped out into the public realm, and the mothers were invited to perform at a local library. Now, with two critically acclaimed CDs and many more children, the Funky Mamas perform regularly at festivals, fairs, theatres and a host of community events across the country.

These professional mother-musicians have enriched their lives and the lives of those around them with and through music making. They enjoy and embody rich,

meaningful, and life-enhancing relationships with music – the kind of relationship that music educators would do well to nurture and help learners to develop. The purpose of this study was to examine the music learning and making of the Funky Mamas with a view to informing the practices of music educators and contributing in turn, hopefully, to ‘the broader educational mission to create societies that are musically diverse, vibrant and vital’ (Bowman 2009: 127).

The work described in this article is nested within a larger project conceived in response to concern regarding limited music activity beyond formal music education experiences (Mantie and Tucker 2008; Myers 2008). The project was designed to explore the learning that enables lifelong engagement with music by examining the music making and learning of those who *do* continue to engage. Ultimately, the goal of this project is to determine how music educators might help learners develop the ability to seek out and engage in rich and sustained relationships with music making beyond the realm of formal music education – ideally, for the rest of their lives.

Methods

A qualitative case study research methodology (Stake 1995) was employed to explore and examine the music learning and making of the musicians within this unique community. Stake explained, ‘even when our main focus is a phenomenon that is a function, such as “training,” we choose cases that are entities’ (2006: 2). The phenomenon of interest in this study is a function – specifically, music making and learning within communities of practice (CoP). In order to develop understanding of this function, the entity (the case) examined is the band of five musicians known as the Funky Mamas.

Stake (1995) makes a distinction between intrinsic and instrumental case studies. An intrinsic case study focuses on the case itself; understanding the case is of primary importance. An instrumental case study, on the other hand, seeks primarily to understand issues within a case, with a view to extrapolating beyond the case. The study described in this article lies on a continuum between the two; while seeking primarily to understand the music making and learning of this particular band of musicians, there was an implicit hope that the knowledge developed might illuminate, in addition, the music making and learning within other CoP. After all, case study methods enable the exploration of an issue of general interest through the in-depth examination of particular cases (Stake 1995).

Data were collected through interviews and the elicitation of narrative accounts, with each of the band members (Alicia, Chantal, Georgia, Kate and Tannis), and field observations of rehearsals and live performances. These data collection procedures were designed to provide windows into the musicians’ formal and informal music making and learning experiences (Folkestad 2006), musical biographies, lifespan musical development (Burnard 2004), and the nature of the musicians’ relationships with immediate and extended music communities.

Analysis involved the coding and sorting of data for correspondence to emergent themes and for themes suggested and informed by the theoretical framework of Etienne Wenger’s (1998) *Communities of Practice*.

Theoretical Lens: Communities of Practice (CoP)

The intent of this article is to illuminate the learning that occurs as the Funky Mamas engage in their shared practice of music making. Wenger's *Communities of Practice* (CoP) theory (1998, 2006), in which learning is viewed as a result of social participation within CoP, serves as the illuminating floodlight.

What is CoP theory?

'Communities of practice are groups of people who share a concern or a passion for something they do and learn how to do it better as they interact regularly' (Wenger 2006, 'What are Communities of Practice?' section, para. 2). As Wenger explains it, a community of practice has three essential defining elements: the domain, the community and the practice.

Domain: The domain is a shared enterprise or shared area of interest. In the context of the Funky Mamas, the shared enterprise is music making – more specifically, the creating and performing of music for young children.

Community: In pursuing a shared enterprise, those involved coalesce as a community; together they engage in activities (such as singing and playing or going for a hike) and discussions (e.g. about the merits of various children's performers or the trials of parenting). They help each other (e.g. identify a vocal harmony that fits or provide childcare), and share information (such as the chords to accompany a melody or a favourite recipe). Through these interactions the members of the community build relationships that facilitate their ability to learn from each other.

Practice: Members of a community of practice are necessarily practitioners; they *do* something. In order to do it, the members develop a shared repertoire of resources. These may include experiences, stories, tools or ways of addressing problems. Collectively these resources, which require time and sustained interaction to develop, constitute a shared practice. In the context of the Funky Mamas, the shared practice is the creating and performing of music for young children. The Mamas' shared repertoire of developed resources includes skills such as composing, singing, playing, interacting with audiences and parenting; ways of doing things such as rehearsing, arranging performance repertoire, interacting with each other; and tools such as songs, set lists and a communal online calendar.

As intimated by some of the examples provided in the *Community* and *Practice* subsections above, the interactions, practices and developed resources may not be immediately or obviously relevant to the designated domain. As Wenger explains:

The enterprise [...] is what gives coherence to the medley of activities, relations, and objects involved [...] That is why taking a spelling test and shooting spitballs can be part of the same practice. The elements of the repertoire can be very heterogeneous. They gain their coherence not in and of themselves as specific activities, symbols, or artifacts, but from the fact that they belong to the practice of a community pursuing an enterprise. (Wenger 1998: 82)

Accordingly, rehearsing a song and sharing a pot of tea may both represent significant aspects of the Mamas' engagement in a community of practice.

Why use CoP theory?

There are compelling reasons why CoP theory is appropriate as a means of organizing and making sense of the Funky Mamas' music making and learning. Wenger claims 'the concept has turned out to provide a useful perspective on knowing and learning' (Wenger 2006, 'Communities of practice: A brief introduction' section, para. 1). This claim is supported by the theory's extensive employment in social sciences research; many education researchers have found merit in the theory as a means of understanding the learning encountered and observed in a broad variety of communities.

Within the domain of music education, for example, CoP theory has been employed in the analysis of children's play and musicking (Barrett 2005) and playground music learning (Harwood 1998); high school music programmes (Countryman 2009); mentoring novice teachers (Blair 2008) and music teacher training (Ilari 2010); and academic collaboration amongst university faculty (Barrett et al. 2009). Westerlund (2006) used CoP theory to examine the development of musical expertise within rock bands, while Smilde (2008) employed it to examine the lifelong learning of professional musicians. Hewitt (2009) explored particular music styles within post-secondary music programmes as CoP. Waldron (2009) investigated informal music teaching and learning practices amongst 'Old Time' music enthusiasts in cyberspace communities, while Partti and Karlsen (2010) and Salavuo (2006) identified online music sites as venues where community of practice members discuss and gain knowledge related to musical interests.

In addition to the impressive track record of CoP theory as a frequently employed tool in music education research, the theory has hallmarks that correspond directly to the Funky Mamas. For example, a foundational aspect of Wenger's conception of CoP is that members engage in a joint enterprise, and it is 'the enterprise that keeps a community of practice together' (1998: 77). I asked Funky Mama Alicia about the role music making played in building and sustaining the Funky Mamas community. She responded: 'As time goes on, it's the music that holds it together. That we've got this shared project'.

In investigating the music making of the Funky Mamas, it very quickly became apparent that learning happened informally when they gathered together. Wenger explains that the CoP lens 'allows us to see past more obvious formal structures such as organizations, classrooms, or nations, and perceive the structures defined by engagement in practice and the informal learning that comes with it' (2006, 'What do communities of practice look like?' section, para. 5). The notion of 'informal learning that comes through engagement in practice' captures the essence of the type of learning that I believe I observed amongst the Funky Mamas, and that holds much potential for re-invigorating formal music education (Green 2002, 2008).

How was CoP theory employed?

In order to employ Wenger's theory of social learning meaningfully and usefully within the limited scope of this article, I chose to focus on the aspects of CoP theory that deal specifically with processes of learning in and through practice.

In Wenger's view, learning and practice are inextricably linked, such that 'Learning is the engine of practice, and practice is the history of that learning' (1998: 96). Wenger identifies three categories of learning-in-practice processes experienced by the

community members involved in a shared enterprise: (1) evolving forms of mutual engagement; (2) understanding and tuning their enterprise; and (3) developing their repertoire, styles and discourses (1998: 95). These are the processes that enhance practice; through these processes members of the community learn how to participate in the shared enterprise in which they engage.

Table 1: Learning-in-practice processes (adapted from Wenger 1998: 95).

Evolving forms of mutual engagement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • discovering how to engage, what helps and what hinders; • developing mutual relationships; • defining identities, establishing... <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -who is who, -who is good at what, -who knows what, -who is easy or hard to get along with
Understanding and tuning their enterprise	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • struggling to define the enterprise and reconciling conflicting interpretation of what the enterprise is about; • aligning their engagement with it, and learning to become and hold each other accountable to it
Developing their repertoire, styles and discourses	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • renegotiating the meanings of various elements; • producing or adopting... <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -tools, -ways of doing things, -artefacts, -representations; • recording and recalling events; • telling and retelling stories; • inventing new terms or redefining or abandoning old ones; • creating and breaking routines

Wenger’s perspective on learning-in-practice processes served as the lens through which I analysed the data gathered from and with the Funky Mamas. This system of perceiving and organizing aspects of learning provided the filter through which I poured the interview and observation transcripts. The filtered data, therefore, emerged sorted and assembled into a model of learning corresponding to and illuminated by Wenger’s theory.

Findings

Wenger’s learning-in-practice processes (1998: 95) were very much in evidence within the music making and learning of the Funky Mamas. While a comprehensive discussion of the processes identified is far beyond the scope of this article, I will briefly address each of the three categories of learning-in-practice processes, provide examples from the data, and detail how the Funky Mamas’ practices correspond to CoP theory.

Evolving forms of mutual engagement

The Funky Mamas have been creating and performing music for young children for over a decade. Over the course of that time they have evolved and defined particular ways of engaging in this shared enterprise together.

Discovering how to engage, what helps and what hinders: The data clearly indicated that, from the band's formation, the Funky Mamas have consciously and conscientiously worked to achieve an emotionally safe environment for music making and learning.

Some people had more musical backgrounds than others – like Georgia was actually a musician playing with a band at the time. But everyone was still really... I guess 'open.' Non-judgmental. It just felt very safe. (Alicia)

Revealing one's musical abilities to others can be a highly intimidating and potentially fraught experience, especially when those present are considered 'expert' (such as Georgia, who carried the credential of having played in another band). Despite members' various levels of musical ability, all members were made to feel emotionally safe and that their musical contributions were valued.

As the band developed, however, the members' desire to improve their musical product increased the possibility of wounding feelings, and compromising the safety of the environment. Negotiating the balance between maintaining an emotionally safe environment and moving forward musically became increasingly complex.

So when we're trying to fine-tune something I guess we try and put the song first but right secondary would be the person's feelings that might be hurt... 'You know, your banjo sounds totally awful on this song; either cut it out, or do something about it!' Nobody would ever say that to me. It would be... more nicely presented. (Kate)

As the musicians prepare for performance they approach and broach with caution the criticisms necessary for improvement. Interactions are tempered by the knowledge that an effective rehearsal requires that feelings be respected so that the environment remains emotionally safe. On the other hand, as Tannis articulated:

It would be nice to say: 'Come on. Learn your part.' And for all of us to move on without feelings being hurt. Constructive criticism. And we've talked about that and how we all need to be more open to that. (Tannis)

The Mamas have collectively recognized that the band ethos of requiring sensitivity to feelings can compromise musical progress.

Despite the band's valuing of emotional security, there have been instances when feelings have been seriously hurt. In striving for musical improvement there is an inherent risk that words or decisions will wound. While recording the Mamas' second CD, for example:

So it comes to the bass line, and I couldn't get it. Well, I thought it was on but it apparently wasn't. So it was subbed in [...] So you work on it and work on it and work on it and then... no. We can't spend any more time on this. (Alicia)

The instrumental track that Alicia had contributed to the song was cut from the final mix-down, resulting in a feeling of disenfranchisement that continues to rancour.

In the exploration of how to successfully mutually engage in their shared musical enterprise, the Mamas have realized that maintaining an emotionally safe environment is

of considerable significance. They have also recognized that working for musical improvement occasionally requires words and decisions that may offend. The extent to which the Mamas' respect for feelings informs and mitigates their interactions is a dance of ongoing negotiation.

Developing mutual relationships: The relationships amongst the Funky Mamas as musicians are profoundly conflated with their relationships as mothers. Kate explained: 'Just as much as the music was important for us, so was the network of having five other moms who thought along the same lines of parenting; it was a common space for us'. From the start the community self-identified as a group of mothers as much as a band of musicians. During my interview with Alicia, I asked:

So the very first time you got together to make music at Tannis's house, you brought your bass? (Researcher)

No. (Laughing.) I brought my baby! We were all looking for support as new moms just as much as anything. (Alicia)

In addition to sharing the motherhood role, the women also (as Kate mentioned) found commonalities in their approach to parenting:

It was unique that, for the most part, we all stayed at home. And we had that like-mindedness. That was quite an important bond that we shared. Not to judge other people – what they were choosing – but each of us for our own reason, we just couldn't. (Alicia)

As Wenger explained, 'Whatever it takes to make mutual engagement possible is an essential component of any practice' (1998: 74). Motherhood provided the common ground where the band members could feel the sense of belonging necessary for meaningful mutual engagement. Their shared experiences of (and approach to) motherhood put them on the same wavelength and engendered a wealth of subject matter with which to engage both through and alongside their music making.

Motherhood provided a common ground for the music making to take place, but it also informed *how* the Mamas participated in their shared practice. The motherhood bond served as a touchstone for the community's forms of engagement with music making. For example, the presence of offspring at music sessions was not only tolerated, but indeed expected.

We were either pregnant or breast-feeding for the first eight years of our business [...] there was always a babe with us, and if you look back (we have a lot of archival photos) there's always kids – *our* kids – running around in the background. (Kate)

[...] a lot of practicing with flipcharts and kids running around the house; all of us had kids under ten. So fifteen kids running around [...] we would have our own little playgroup at the house, which was a 'practice'. (Tannis)

Well as you're practicing, somebody's nursing, someone's changing a diaper [...] it's not like a regular practice as you would see with a lot of musicians. It was very 'in the moment.' Everybody brought with. The kids were in the environment – were being raised in the environment. We weren't necessarily singing to them, but they were exposed to it – breathing it, eating it – it was in the air. (Alicia)

The Funky Mamas shared the understanding that their children, rather than getting in the way, were actually an integral component of their music making. Motherhood not only influenced the Mamas' music-making process, but also their musical products. Most significantly, the band chose to focus on creating and performing music *for* young children. The women's intimate knowledge of their own children richly informed their engagement with the children – and parents – in their audiences. From song subject matter (there's a dinosaur in my bathtub) to set list pacing the Mamas have drawn heavily from the knowledge and understandings personally *and mutually* developed through parenting experiences. Their collective approach to motherhood is expressed through the music they create and perform. This is not to suggest that the mothers have seen eye-to-eye on all aspects of parenting (any more than they have seen eye-to-eye on all aspects of making music), but rather that the music represents the negotiated commonalities the Mamas have found.

The bond of motherhood has powerfully impacted the development of relationships amongst these musicians *and* the evolution of their mutual engagement with the shared enterprise of creating and performing music for young children.

Defining identities: In addition to discovering how to engage (what helps and hinders) and developing mutual relationships, evolving forms of mutual engagement also entails the defining of identities (Wenger 1998). When I asked how working towards their shared enterprise has affected the Funky Mamas as a group of friends, Georgia offered: 'It makes us define our roles more; for the arctic trip coming up I'm the meal planner'. Georgia is also the Mama who can pick up virtually any tune by ear; who plays the guitar, mandolin, squeezebox and musical saw; and who has a voice – in the words of Chantal – 'like butter'. The Funky Mamas have identified and defined roles for themselves and each other that range from the practical (who brings the sound amplification system) to the musical (who plays which instrument) and beyond. Kate, for example, identified the need for – and volunteered to take on – the role of business manager:

At some point I presented to the band: OK, we need to get our act together and have some consistency in booking the shows, and the contracts, and the banking, and this and that and I'm going to take that on. (Kate)

Chantal, meanwhile, has found herself taking on the role of mediator:

I like the group dynamic. I like problem solving – working out our issues. I enjoy those moments, actually. I always feel we're achieving something by working through things. I like building a group and I like keeping it strong and moving forward. (Chantal)

While some roles are voluntarily assumed, others are assigned. The 'SOCAN Mama' is responsible for reporting to the Society of Composers, Authors and Music Publishers of Canada which songs are performed at each concert (so that royalties will be awarded). There is fluidity amongst role assignments; Kate has passed on the mantle of business manager, and fortunately the designation of 'practice bitch' (charged with keeping the rehearsal on-task and productive) rotates amongst band members each session.

Through experiences and resulting realizations encountered in and through the shared enterprise of creating and performing music for young children, the Funky Mamas

learn. They discover what helps and hinders, develop mutual relationships, and define identities; the forms of mutual engagement evolve.

Understanding and tuning their enterprise

Wenger's second category of learning-in-practice processes encompasses those related to understanding and tuning the enterprise. Not only have the Funky Mamas evolved particular ways of engaging together in the creation and performance of music for young children; they have also refined their shared understanding of what that enterprise entails.

Struggling to define the enterprise and reconciling conflicting interpretation of what the enterprise is about. For the Mamas the ongoing negotiation of how technically proficient the band's level of performance ought to be has proved a recurring source of tension. Kate explained:

And some of us feel different about that [what constitutes a satisfactory level of proficiency]. For example I'm always the one that – it feels like it anyway – that's pushing: OK, let's play that song. Let's perform that song; it's fine, it's great... and there are other members that really feel that it has to be better than what it is at that particular moment. (Kate)

At what point in the rehearsal process does a song no longer warrant the expenditure of time and energy? The band members experience conflict as they negotiate whether a song is ready for performance or not. Tannis, for example, described feeling frustrated by the lack of precision in vocal harmonies during concert performances.

It's the one thing that's getting under my skin right now. We've come to the realization that what we need to do is to practice our vocals; just have a guitar, and record our vocals and really decide who sings what and when and where and make sure everybody sticks to that. (Tannis)

Other band members, however, do not always share Tannis's wishes and expectations for vocal precision. As a means of reconciling such differences, the Mamas (for the most part) have adopted a viewpoint that it is worthwhile striving for technical perfection for the commercial recordings, but not for live shows. Within the context of live performance, the Funky Mamas have recognized other aspects of music making that they value more; they have defined different goals.

With a recording [...] it's very fine-tuned, whereas our performance is the live experience which we have realized is different. And when people are coming to a live show they're experiencing the music but they're also experiencing... they're wanting to take home a really nice memory of the experience of having live music with their children. So it doesn't need to be perfection. We just need to present what we do best and put our energy into it and there's the visual there and it's the whole thing and as soon as the song's done it's done; it's not like they're listening to it over and over and critiquing it. (Kate)

The differentiation of expectations for performance versus recording has been significant in the band's struggle to define their enterprise. The Mamas have realized that, for live performances, the creation of a memorable experience for the audience is paramount. The memorable experience is achieved as a result of the whole Funky Mamas

package, with visual elements and factors such as energy contributing far more than musical perfection.

Aligning their engagement with the enterprise: The process of struggle and conflict in defining and interpreting the enterprise contributes directly to an alignment of engagement. Having eschewed the need for technical musical perfection in live performance, the Mamas instead find meaning aligning their engagement with the focus of connecting with the children in the audience.

In the circuit, especially with the fiddle [...] there are so many virtuosos and they spend their entire lives studying, and I don't. (I mean I still take lessons, but I'm not nearly at that level that is out there.) And then trying to find the worth in what we're doing, in terms of not necessarily being the most musically accomplished [...] but every time you play a show and you see the kids' faces afterwards... that's where you take your feedback from. (Chantal)

To counter the feelings of inadequacy that arise from comparing herself on a technical level to other violinists in the circuit, Chantal has learned to 'find the worth' instead in what she and the band *are* able to provide for their young audiences. This alignment of engagement has proved valuable to the band. Kate explained: 'being able to really remind ourselves that we're doing this for the kids in the audience is something that's allowed us to move forward. Because we aren't self-critiquing too much'. Chantal articulated that in shifting away from self-criticism she is able, instead, to focus on what she is *giving* to her audience.

I remember my daughter's Suzuki teacher telling her – and I love this analogy – when you perform, it's like giving a gift to somebody. You're gracious and you're holding your hands out and you're saying: here is what I am giving. And that's how I see it now, as opposed to getting up there and thinking about 'oh, am I doing this wrong?' There's something freeing about letting go of that and just saying 'here you go. This is for you.' And it also makes you think more about how you're giving it, and what you want to say in the giving. (Chantal)

As indicated here, Chantal has aligned her engagement with a focus on 'giving' to the children in the audience. So has Georgia: '[...] maybe before I would have thought someone might not want something from me. But now I'm much more willing to give [...] when you're playing a show you're giving something to the audience'.

Tannis also focuses on connecting with the children in the audience, but has aligned her engagement slightly differently. As she points out: 'we all have a different way of connecting with the children'. For Tannis, this involves

Being true and real. Being grounded. So that whatever we're singing about I'm really spreading that message of whatever it is [...] Because if you're just singing [without feeling] then you're not going to get the message out there. So being able to find that grounded place and get the message through the song. (Tannis)

For a community of practice, the process of understanding and tuning the enterprise involves aligning engagement with it. For the Mamas, one manifestation of this alignment has been the decision to focus during live performances on connecting with the children in the audience rather than on achieving technical proficiency. When the Funky Mamas engage in their shared enterprise of creating and performing music for young children, connecting with children is paramount.

...and learning to become and hold each other accountable to it: Once the members of a community of practice have aligned their engagement with the shared enterprise, members need to hold to that alignment. As described above, Chantal has identified that for her, the musical performance is first and foremost an opportunity for giving. Nevertheless, she often finds it necessary to remind herself of this focus.

So that's how I think of myself: more about trying to give the most beautiful gift I can give, in that moment. Sometimes you have to consciously remember that – often, during a performance. You have to get yourself back into that and connect again and remind yourself it's about the presentation, because it's easy to get wrapped up in your own little music head where you're like: Oh! That sounds slightly off! (Chantal)

The Mamas actively strive to keep not only themselves but also each other accountable to the shared primary goal of giving to and connecting with the children in the audience. Kate offered an example of how this works:

I think that we're all pretty good at reminding each other when we're performing what we're trying to do through our eye contact. So I might catch somebody's eye who's not looking particularly happy at that moment and remind them – you know, just smile at them, and – 'this is what we're doing, and we're having a great time, remember? We're having a really good time with this!' (Kate)

As indicated here, the Funky Mamas have developed strategies for holding each other accountable. Even in the midst of a performance, the Mamas actively strive to ensure all are appropriately engaging in their shared enterprise. The accountability aspect represents the capstone of the processes involved in the Mamas' collective efforts to tune and achieve understanding of their shared enterprise of creating and performing music for young children.

Developing their shared repertoire, styles and discourses

The third and final category of learning-in-practice processes that Wenger identifies encompasses the production and development of things – whatever is needed to enhance the carrying out of the shared enterprise, from viewpoints to protocols to stories to tools.

Producing or adopting tools, ways of doing things, artefacts, representations: The Funky Mamas produce songs, which may be viewed as tools, ways of doing things, artefacts, *and* representations. The songs are tools in that they enable the band to connect with the audience. Songs are also ways of doing things, with decisions about who plays what or sings what or dances how firmly embedded within them. Songs are artefacts in that they are created and exist to provide a material legacy of the band's work. Songs are also representations of what the band members care about and value and wish to share. For the Mamas, the producing of songs includes composing or discovering and selecting, learning how to play/sing, arranging, rehearsing, performing and recording.

A particularly intriguing aspect of the group's producing of songs involves a process of collaborative composing. Kate provided a breathless account of a Funky Mamas song coming into existence:

I took it upon myself to write a song specifically to the theme of blast off into reading (because that would help us to secure library tour gigs). It was really more a poem than anything else but what it grew into was something I never would have expected to have written, which was a really heavy bass line, and... ‘Kate, you can do it, just sing from your heart, you can rap this one out!’ and I’m thinking: this is not what I expected I’d be doing with this song! But it came together and fairly organically. I just brought the words and said: let’s make this something more than what it is. And then we actually performed it live many times before we actually made it into what it was. That’s a particular incident of me writing something that didn’t end up exactly how I thought it was going to. (Kate)

Of note in this account is the communal input that shaped the song into something very different than Kate had originally envisioned. She explained that it was very difficult ‘to be able to let go’. In order for the song to reach its potential, Kate had to relinquish ownership and accept the suggestions and modifications offered by the band. This collaborative composing serves as an example of one of the Mamas’ ‘ways of doing things’. The developing of shared repertoire, styles (such as ways of doing things) and discourses constitutes the third category of learning-in-practice processes in which CoP engage.

Creating and breaking routines: According to Wenger’s theory, developing shared repertoire, styles and discourses also involves the creating and breaking of routines. The Funky Mamas have established a routine of deliberately connecting at a personal level before each rehearsal. Kate explained: ‘so even today our first point of business when we meet is not to whip out our instruments and start playing music, it’s to check in with each other’. The Mamas consciously make and take the time and space to socialize. ‘We gather, we try and be on time (but it doesn’t work very often), and when we get there we spend a bit of time seeing how everybody is, and making a pot of tea’. The notion of nurturing community is a valued and honoured aspect of the Funky Mamas’ rehearsal routine. The Mamas come together to make music; however, as suggested earlier in this article, their coming together has also represented for the members, as Alicia explained, ‘the building of a small community and a support system. And a shelter, too, where you could start to say what was going on for you, and how was this working or not working’.

The Mamas have recognized the value of the personal support their community is able to provide. This recognition is manifested in the creation and sustaining of the routine of beginning each rehearsal with a chat and a pot of tea.

Renegotiating the meanings of various elements: In addition to the creating and breaking of routines, the development of shared repertoire, styles and discourses also involves ongoing meaning making. ‘Sustained engagement in shared practice is a dynamic form of coordination, one that generates “on the fly” the coordinated meanings that allow it to proceed’ (Wenger 1998: 84). Earlier in this article I described how the Mamas had negotiated technical musical proficiency to be of lesser importance than other aspects of performing music for young children – an area of focus they could save for the recording studio. More recently, the Mamas seem to be re-visiting this perspective:

We've realized in the last six months that we're needing to up the ante a little bit and to make it more than just about community; we need to make it tighter and better. It feels better when it's tight, right? It's important. (Tannis)

To highlight another example of ongoing meaning making, I described above how the Mamas' bond of motherhood held them together; it sustained their mutual relationships and their engagement in the shared enterprise. Motherhood also governed their approach to creating and performing music. More recently, however, the motherhood emphasis seems to have shifted.

I love the fact that we're all moms, that's what we do... but I wonder if it should be in our promotional package as the number one reason to hire us. (Georgia)

We were more like sisters, supporting each other with our babies... I'm not sure if we were supporting each other enough with our music, and being clear with each other. (Tannis)

The commitment has shifted now, even since our last CD, it's becoming less about us hanging out as a group of friends and more about: OK, these are the things that we need to do. This is the business plan [...] Because now many years have passed, and different people have different sets of expectations [...] Now that warm and fuzzy zone, where everyone was in that sheltered space of: 'Well we're raising our kids, and we need to be there for them.' Well now my eldest is fourteen, and... I'm looking at it so much differently. (Alicia)

I also described, just a few paragraphs ago, how the Mamas valued the nurturing of their community, and that this was manifested in their routine of beginning each rehearsal with tea and conversation. As civilized as such an approach to music making may seem, Tannis, for example, occasionally craves 'a little more simplicity. [Laughing.] Much as I love them all, it can be a little complicated sometimes'. Alicia, meanwhile, suggested: 'sometimes it is just better to stop talking and play. Because we're not all on the same wavelength because when our kids were younger there were more shared obvious issues and things were more... simple'.

Such shifts are inherent in a community of practice. Wenger wrote that the joint enterprise that keeps a community together 'is the result of a collective process of negotiation that reflects the full complexity of mutual engagement' (1998: 77). Inevitably, individuals change, and so too their perspectives; this is one of the key reasons mutual engagement is so complex. Nevertheless, a community of practice can weather these changes, and is able to embrace new meanings, as long as the joint enterprise exists. 'Defining a joint enterprise is a process, not a static agreement' (Wenger 1998: 82).

As time goes on, it's the music that holds it together. That we've got this shared project. So when we're all in different stages of our lives and we've all got different issues, and we've grown into who we are, a little more deeply... sometimes it is just better to stop talking and play. (Alicia)

Implications for music education

This study has richly validated CoP theory. Examination of the Funky Mamas' music making and learning clearly revealed the learning processes Wenger identified as

integral to CoP; these processes enable and sustain the Funky Mamas' music making and learning. It follows, then, that the Funky Mamas' processes of learning through practice might usefully serve as examples of the processes music educators would do well to support, nurture and encourage within the CoP in which their own music learners participate. The implication for music education becomes apparent: educators can support music making and learning by supporting the learning processes that naturally occur within musical CoP.

Supporting music making within CoP

First of all, educators need to support learners in creating and participating in CoP within *and beyond* music rooms, schools and studios. Examples of musical CoP may include school music programmes (Countryman 2009), classes, large and small ensembles, song-writing circles, garage bands (Westerlund 2006), jam sessions, online chat sites (Partti and Karlsen 2010; Salavuo 2006; Waldron 2009), schoolyard musical play (Barrett 2005; Harwood 1998), and so on – in short, any environment where individuals gather to participate in music (or music-related) experiences.

As learners participate in musical CoP, educators can nurture and support the specific learning-through-practice processes that Wenger identified and that have been illustrated above with examples from the Funky Mamas' experiences. To detail just a few examples: educators could facilitate the process of *evolving forms of mutual engagement* by encouraging members of the community to find and explore common ground (e.g. shared interests within but also beyond music). Hopefully, this will enable the group to coalesce and members to effectively learn with and from each other. For the Mamas, the bond of motherhood brought and held the musicians together. Educators might also facilitate *understanding and tuning the shared enterprise* by encouraging members of the community to align their engagement with the musical venture; educators might offer as an example of alignment the Funky Mamas' focus on connecting with children rather than achieving technical musical perfection. In addition, educators could support communities in *developing their repertoire, styles and discourses* by encouraging members to create and break routines; educators might offer as an example the value (and complexities) the Mamas found in beginning rehearsals with a chat and a pot of tea.

Ideally, by nurturing these processes of learning through practice, an educator might help the community of practice to thrive, thereby enabling meaningful music making and learning amongst its members. Such nurturing may involve educators actively helping students to recognize and render conscious these processes, then supporting their development through advice and coaching. Alternatively, educators may prefer that understanding of the processes remains tacit, and simply assist learning by providing the group with the resources needed (such as time, a place to get together, instruments, etc.). With this *laissez-faire* approach, the educator can allow the learning-in-practice processes to occur as they will, drawing attention to them if and when it is useful to do so. It will be up to the educator, of course, to analyse her particular teaching and learning contexts to determine the degree to which explicit knowledge of CoP theory and reference to the learning-in-practice processes may be helpful to learners.

While the support role for music educators may be more obvious when the CoP gather within the teachers' immediate spheres of influence (such as classrooms, schools and other formal music learning environments), there is also a role for music educators in

enhancing students' experiences and understandings of CoP that operate further afield. There is rich potential in informal music making and learning experiences (Folkestad 2006; Green 2002, 2008; Jaffurs 2004, 2006), and educators might help students develop this potential. Armed with an awareness of how CoP operate, students may be able to apply and benefit from this knowledge within all the CoP in which they participate – even those beyond the educator's domain. This transfer of understanding could be left for students to implicitly infer, or educators might render it explicit by employing class discussions and assignments to facilitate the drawing of connections between CoP processes and students' out-of-school music making and learning.

A bridge to the beyond

While the musical learning encountered in a classroom or studio community of practice will be beneficial, of even greater benefit will be a development of the understanding – whether tacit or overt – of how and why to participate in a community of practice. It is this broader outcome that holds such exciting promise for music education. Wenger explains:

the school is not the privileged locus of learning. It is not a self-contained, closed world in which students acquire knowledge to be applied outside, but a part of a broader learning system. The class is not the primary learning event. It is life itself that is the main learning event. Schools, classrooms, and training sessions still have a role to play in this vision, but they have to be in the service of the learning that happens in the world. (2006: 'Where is the concept being applied?' section, para. 5)

It is not enough that music educators create and provide music making and learning opportunities and experiences for their students, no matter how rich and wonderful they may be. Learners need to be able to build such opportunities and experiences on their own, without the assistance of teachers, beyond the realm of formal music learning. As Bowman wrote:

People experience our musical curricula and our instructional interventions [...] They may cooperate, tolerate, participate – and even take certain pleasure in them. But too often, when they leave us, the habits, attitudes and dispositions we have nurtured, the kinds of community we have unknowingly created are of little relevance or use. (2009: 127)

I suggest that music educators must strive *to know* the kinds of community they are creating, and that a means of better knowing those communities may be to view and understand them as CoP. As such, they will be relevant and useful to learners. Somehow, music educators need to connect what happens within formal music education with what happens or might happen beyond it. Learners need to understand the relevance of the formal music making experiences they encounter. CoP theory offers that bridge to the beyond. If educators can support students in experiencing the learning potential of CoP, students will take with them not only the inherent learning gained through participation, but also the knowledge of the *potential* of CoP, and therefore a desire to continue to participate in them. If the students are also able to develop an understanding of how to maximize the effectiveness of participation within CoP (e.g. by defining an enterprise and aligning engagement with it), the potential for future learning increases accordingly.

Armed with the knowledge of their learning potential *and* the knowledge of how to make CoP thrive, it follows that learners will seek them out and benefit by engaging with

them. Through effective participation in musical CoP, students will have the means to continue to sustain music making and learning far beyond the classrooms and studios of formal music education – perhaps even for the rest of their lives.

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